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QUEENS DIE PROUDLY

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by W. L. White

W.N.U. FEATURES

THE STORY THUS FAR: Lieut. Col. Frank Kurtz, pilot of a Flying Fortress, tells of that fatal day when the Japs struck in the Philippines. Eight of his men were killed fleeing for shelter and Old 99, with many other Fortresses, was demolished before it could get off the ground. After escaping to Australia, what is left of the squadron flies to Java where they go out on many missions over the Philippines. Six Fortresses go on a mission over Macassar Strait where there is a huge concentration of Jap ships. They make their bomb runs and on the return trip Major Robinson's plane goes into a dive and crashes into the sea. U. S. planes circle over the dead Queen.

CHAPTER XIII

"I now watched this last four falling through what was practically a striped fog made by Jap pom-poms coming up at us. We could see the Japs crowding the rails, trying to jump overboard as the bombs gathered speed. The first bomb plunked into the water alongside, but the other three went smack! smack! smack! right down what had been her promenade deck, and it looked like she was coughing up into the sky a kind of confetti made up of planking splinters and Jap infantry. My right wing man, who was releasing his bombs synchronized with me, scored four hits across the back of this ship.

"You ought to hear Beardshear, our tail gunner, tell about it. Not having any Zeros to keep him busy, he was enjoying the scenery and playing 'Yankee Doodle' on the deck planking with his .50-calibers. He says we passed over so close that he looked down the funnels, and he called to us over the interphones that he could see what they were going to have for chow—rice and fish heads. Then we made our turn, and went on back to Batavia, which was crowded with refugees from Singapore.

"About this time," said Frank Kurtz, "I got word from the Colonel that at last some American P-40 fighters were on their way up from Australia, equipped with belly tanks so they could take it in hops, landing for fuel at Kupang airdrome on Timor Island. It was part of my liaison job to get them settled with the Dutch fighters at their airdrome at Gnorro. It was another beautifully hidden field. The Dutch had to lead them to it with an escort plane.

"When they landed I found there were nine, led by my old friend Major Bud Sprague, whom I hadn't seen since the Philippines. I asked him where Buzz Wagner was, and he said Buzz just hadn't been lucky. They'd told them in Australia that one of them had to stay behind and give the newly arriving fighter pilots a little extra training, while the other would lead the squadron in Java. Buzz and Bud had tossed an Australian shilling to decide it, and Buzz had lost; he was stuck with that training job.

"The Dutch fighter pilots, who are just as prancy as ours, were all excited and doing their stuff. They'd led Bud in formation, and now they were putting on a show for him. They'd dive onto the field in an attack string, and just before they hit, they turned almost straight up in the air and then, a few thousand feet up, that string opened out in all directions like the petals of a rose.

"Bud had to admit the Dutch were good. But he said he had to take one of his planes up for a test that afternoon and show 'em how to fly. 'Bud hit it off with them right away. He praised the camouflage on their field. When he came back next day, I heard him take his own youngsters in hand. Of course it was the old hokey, but he gave them one serious warning.

"This is the best-camouflaged field we'll ever operate on," he told them, 'so remember—I don't want anyone to cross this field with a Zero on his tail. Bail out, beach it, but don't come back here with company.' As a result, the Japanese didn't find Gnorro Field until two days before the end.

"Not long after they came, I rang Bud up with a queer assignment for the boys. We were doing everything possible to stop the Japs from swarming over onto Sumatra from Malaya. The Forts were out pasting their landing barges morning and night. We were using them practically as heavy pursuit—skimming down under the weather to chase landing barges going up the rivers.

"So we asked Bud to deliver a little strafing, and off they went, carrying belly tanks to get them there and stopping off at Andir. They went to work with 30-pound fragmentation bombs and their machine guns, and when they got back Bud reported the P-40's had had Japs diving off those barges in full field

equipment. He sank quite a few and drowned hundreds of Japs, and every P-40 got back to Java.

"But they were closing in on us from still another direction. We could no longer operate from those advance fields at Kendari and Samarinda across the Java Sea. The Japs had moved into Borneo and the Celebes. So we waited for what we knew was coming. They must be stacking Jap bombers onto what had been our own fields there—within easy range of Java.

"We didn't have to wait long. One morning I was at the KNILM Airfield at Surabaya, checking on a transport plane which was supposed to be bringing in ground crews for Bud Sprague's fighters, when at Operations they reported in great excitement that a Jap bomber force was over Java itself, headed down the island.

(Abbreviation for "Kaninklijke Nederlands-Indische Luchtvaart Maatschappij," meaning Royal Dutch Indies Airplane Company.)

"I was panic-stricken for fear they might branch off at Malang and catch our Forts on the ground there. Luckily the pass was bottled up with fog, so they came on down toward us at Surabaya.

"At almost exactly eleven o'clock we could hear them hitting the city off in the distance. We knew they wouldn't miss us. I'll never forget



He had been anxious that his wife know that he was all right. He died at three in the morning.

poor old Baalerts, the head of that KNILM Field. He'd never been bombed before, and asked me what to do. He had already crawled into his car. I told him that was the worst thing he could do, that we should run for the concrete slit trenches at the edge of the field.

"As we ran, we could hear the hollow echo as the bombs crashed into the oil storage base. They practically leveled Moro Kambangem, the Dutch naval base there, coming in out of the sun—it was really a beautiful job from the professional standpoint. It's second in size only to Singapore. The docks were left a shambles. Our American Navy's PBV's of Patrol Wing 10 were anchored there. One or two were burned on the ways, but the rest managed to take off, although the Japs strafed a dingy full of sailors rowing out to them. They also scored a direct hit on the barracks there, so for the second time those poor guys of Patrol Wing 10 lost all they had—the first had been at Cavite in the Philippines.

"Now came the third wave, headed right for our airdrome. Echoing around in the cement of our slit trenches, the sound of the crashes was terrific. Poor old Baalerts was down there lying on the concrete floor, his white bridal suit soaking up half an inch of dirty rain water. We were all thankful when we heard that bomb pattern moving away. They'd laid a nice strip across the field, but only one bomb happened to hit the macadama strip.

"It was just hoisting out of the trench what was left of our bridegroom—there had been a lot of noise and I'm afraid his condition was pretty grave—when the Zeros hit, so we got Baalerts back down again.

"We watched one Dutchman coming in for fuel when two Zeros

crossed his tail, their guns going full-blast, hammering tracers into his tail—watched his plane roll over and dive into the red dust at the edge of the field.

"Now another Dutch pilot comes in, with a Zero streaking for his tail, the Dutchman dodging all the way to the ground. Fifty feet from the ground he slips to the right to avoid that stream of tracers, but it's too late. Flames come gushing out, yet he manages to land and jump out of the burning plane. It's a terrific fight overhead; we can hear the faraway rattles as they clear their guns—the brave Dutch kids are fighting for their homeland, and seven planes were lost that morning of the twelve which had been Java's only defending Dutch fighter force.

"As I climbed out I realized the picture was darkening fast. We were depending on our Fortresses to keep the Jap transports away from Java, but we had to have fighters to defend our flying fields.

"But it wasn't until later in the day that I found out the Zeros had got Major Straubel, one of our own squadron commanders. He'd been piloting a B-18 we used for transportation, and was coming from Malang to Surabaya to talk with General Brett. The Zeros hit, and from the ground they saw him go over the hill on fire.

"While the liaison work lasted I was quartered at the big hotel in Surabaya, and the whole thing didn't feel right. You weren't sure of these natives as you had been of the Filipinos. That night a few were shot who were caught flashing lights into the air. And at the hotel the barefooted waiters, who slipped silently between tables and in and out of the high-ceilinged rooms, began to disappear.

"My own boy turned up a couple of days later, however—with tears in his eyes. Said he was back and to stay. He wasn't sure what this war was about, but he'd taken his mother and sister to the country, and was back for the rest of the war.

"Jap Intelligence must have been very good, because one bomber had peeled off the formation and made a direct run on the newly completed Dutch Army-Navy building (they had just moved in), scoring a near-miss.

"The Forts of course had been pounding away at the Japs, and had come back with ominous news—they'd spotted a Jap carrier out in the Java Sea and sent it away limping. If they'd had more strength and could have laid down a denser bomb pattern, they'd have sunk the damned thing. The Navy's PBV flying boats of Patrol Wing 10 were doing a wonderful reconnaissance job finding targets for us—every morning or so you might wake up to find a Jap carrier at almost any corner of the island. The PBV's would sight a little task force in the evening, but by the time I got word to our Forts to be out there next morning, often it had slipped away.

"Most important of all, ten more fighters presently arrived—hopping up from Australia via our stepping-stones of Timor and Bali. They were led in by Captain Will Connolly, a commercial pilot, who flew a Beechcraft and did the navigating for the fighters—that isn't part of their training. He reported they'd only lost one, which cracked up in landing at Timor Field.

"But they'd had plenty of excitement. Just as they were approaching Timor the boys had engaged and shot down a Jap fighter. It made Connolly plenty jittery. He was an old hand at flying, but his little Beechcraft had no guns, and wouldn't have lasted a minute in combat. So he hurried on out of there to land at Bali for lunch. But en route he sighted what was either a twin-tailed Messerschmitt 110 or a twin-engine Mitsubishi bomber, on patrol, which altered course and was coming toward them.

"Will Connolly had no radio in his Beechcraft to warn the ten P-40's in the formation he was leading, so he started going up and down frantically to signal them. Sure enough, the kids got the idea, and the two fighters on his wing peeled off and headed for the Jap. The first one put out his port engine, but the Jap feathered it and kept on going. But then he was hit by the second P-40, which, in spite of the fact that only two of its six guns were working, knocked out the starboard motor.

"You should have heard those American kids when they got in. Most of them were just out of flying school, and had never before flown a P-40 except for the three-hour practice Buzz Wagner had been able to give them as they passed through Brisbane. But now they had drawn first blood, and they were excited and yipping like a bunch of fox terrier pups chasing their first rabbit.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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